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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4848
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHYE/AMEMBASSY YEREVAN 0071
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3748
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 000522

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT
DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON
DRL/NESA FOR WHITMAN, BARGHOUT
OVP FOR HMUSTAFA

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: ARMENIAN TASHNAQ WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT
THE PRESIDENCY

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Armenian opposition Tashnaq MP Hagop Pakradunian expressed his party's support for President Michel Sleiman and said the party will side with Sleiman in case of a dispute between the president and Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) leader Michel Aoun who is their political ally for the election. He described Sleiman as a wise and shrewd person, but argued for stronger presidential powers. Pakradunian opposes the idea of a blocking third in the next cabinet and hoped the President will choose his ministers from all confessions. End summary.

2. (C) During a May 5 meeting with Pol/Econ Chief and Senior LES Political Advisor, Armenian opposition Tashnaq MP Hagop Pakradunian said his party would "stand next" to President Michel Sleiman should a dispute arise between Sleiman and FPM leader Michel Aoun. Tashnaq is allied with Aoun for the 2009 election. However, Pakradunian noted with confidence that both Sleiman and Aoun have great respect for each other and described the rumors about Aoun seeking to topple Sleiman after the parliamentary elections as total "nonsense."

3. (C) Pakradunian said that while President Sleiman was unable to achieve great things over the past year, he is a "wise and shrewd person." He lauded Sleiman's capabilities for engaging in dialogues with all parties and he appreciated Sleiman's negotiation techniques in his efforts to solve problems. He noted that during the national dialogue rounds that were held at the presidential palace, Sleiman used his negotiations skills to maintain a congenial atmosphere among the various leaders.

4. (C) Pakradunian commented that Sleiman needs to have some "tools in his hands" in order to govern properly. Pakradunian said he does not favor a blocking third in the next cabinet and added that he hoped the President would be able to appoint ministers of his own choosing from all confessions in the next cabinet. "Having this type of governing tool would make Sleiman a good leader," he

emphasized.

15. (C) Pakradunian described Metn political godfather Michel Murr as an "old man." He said the Armenian party will vote for Murr in the elections, but added that the party would ensure an equal distribution of its votes to the two other Greek orthodox candidates on Aoun's list, Ghassan Rahbani and Ghassan Mukhayber. He added that candidate Rahbani is well liked within the Armenian community, because of his support to the Armenian issues. Pakradunian noted that his preference would be to support Ghassan Mukhayber, who has proven to be a professional legislator.

16. (C) Pakradunian also disclosed that the Armenian community strongly supports Michel Aoun and cited the April 24 commemoration of the Armenian "genocide" as an example. He said all of Aoun's MPs paid tribute to the Armenian community, while PM Fouad Siniora decided to hold a cabinet session on the same day. He disclosed that the Armenians were unhappy with President Sleiman's recent trip to Turkey, and expressed their displeasure to Sleiman upon his return on April 23. (Note: This was the first visit by a Lebanese President to Turkey in almost 50 years. End note).

SISON